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PAGE 001
TOR: 211848Z FEB 84

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EXDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARN;PASS TO AMB PAGANELLI WITHOUT DELAY

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
 TAGS: PREL, MARR, MOPS, SY, US, LE
 SUBJECT: CODEL TOWER'S CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN
 - PRESIDENT ASSAD FEBRUARY 21

REF: BEIRUT 1894

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT).

2. SUMMARY: ASSAD TOLD SENATOR TOWER HE REJECTS THE EIGHT POINTS BECAUSE THEY LINK ISRAEL AND SYRIA IN ONE PROPOSAL (JUST AS HARIRI HAD TOLD ELIE SALEM - REFTTEL); SARG IS OPEN TO NEGOTIATIONS WHEN SUCH LINKAGE IS ELIMINATED AND DOES NOT OBJECT TO GOL MAKING REASONABLE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN THE SOUTH. ASSAD SEEMED INTRIGUED WITH SENATOR'S SUGGESTION THAT ISRAEL WOULD ACCEPT SOME SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IF THE NORTHERN ISRAELI BORDER WERE SECURE, BUT STRESSED SARG WILL DEFINITELY DEPART WHEN A REAL GNU IS FORMED, EVEN IF GNU ASKS IT TO STAY. GEMAYEL, ASSAD SAID, HAS SYRIA'S SUPPORT IF HE SHARES SYRIA'S GOALS (OF GNU AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON), BUT NO PARTY SHOULD COME TO THE VITAL NATIONAL DIALOGUE AS A "LOSER." MAY 17 MUST BE ELIMINATED. END SUMMARY.

3. DURING HIS HOUR AND ONE-QUARTER MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD FEB 21, SENATOR TOWER PRESSED ASSAD HARD FOR SPECIFICS, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO THE EIGHT POINTS AND CONDITIONS FOR SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL. FULL MEMCON FOLLOWS IN SEPTTEL; FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS.

4. ASSAD AGREED WITH SENATOR TOWER'S PROPOSITION THAT USG AND SYRIA HAVE MUTUAL GOALS FOR LEBANON: NEITHER WANTS PARTITION AND BOTH WANT A GNU. BUT WHEN ASKED WHAT HE

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

84 3429786

SSO

PAGE 002

NC 3429786

TOR: 211848Z FEB 84

DID NOT LIKE IN THE EIGHT POINTS, ASSAD SAID SYRIA WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THOSE PROPOSALS. THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THOSE WHO WISH TO DEAL WITH SYRIA, MUST DO SO ON AN EQUAL FOOTING. "WE DO NOT ACCEPT NAMING US IN DOCUMENTS IN WHICH WE ARE LINKED WITH ISRAEL." LATER IN THE CONVERSATION, ASSAD SPECIFIED THAT WHEN SYRIA IS NOT MENTIONED IN "FRAMEWORKS AND PROPOSITIONS, OTHER OPTIONS CAN BE DISCUSSED." IN PARTICULAR, ASSAD SAID (AND REPEATED TWICE), THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON MAY TAKE APPROPRIATE SECURITY MEASURES IN SOUTH LEBANON, SYRIA WILL NOT OBJECT. AT PRESENT, ASSAD CONTINUED, SARG CAN DISCUSS NOTHING AS LONG AS THERE ARE NEGOTIATIONS UNDERWAY CONCERNING SYRIAN-LEBANESE RELATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAID, THE EIGHT POINTS COULD HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED HAD SYRIA NOT APPEARED IN THEM; "THIS" (PRESUMABLY "THIS" REFERS TO SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL) CAN BE DISCUSSED ONLY WITH A GNU FOLLOWING FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. SYRIA, HE EMPHASIZED STRONGLY, WILL NEVER, REPEAT NEVER, LINK ITS WITHDRAWAL WITH ISRAEL WITHDRAWAL. ASSAD NOTED THAT PRIOR TO THE ISRAELI INVASION, THE USG HAD NOT, REPEAT NOT, REQUESTED SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL; FOR SYRIA TO ADMIT LINKAGE NOW WOULD BE EQUIVALENT TO AN ADMISSION "WE HAVE SURRENDERED OUR PEOPLE IN LEBANON TO ISRAEL", AND WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE RELATIONSHIP CAN BE EQUATED TO THE SYRIAN-LEBANESE RELATIONSHIP.

5. ASKED, THEN, WHAT SYRIAN PROPOSALS ARE, ASSAD SAID AND REPEATED LATER, SYRIA WANTS TO RESTORE LEBANON TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE THE INVASION. ASKED AGAIN HOW THIS COULD BE DONE, HE SAID THE MOST IMPORTANT SYRIAN PROPOSAL PUT TO THE U.S. HAD BEEN THAT THE USG IMPLEMENT ITS "AGREEMENT" WITH SARG, I.E., PRESIDENT REAGAN'S "COMMITMENTS" PASSED THROUGH HABIB, FOR CEASEFIRE FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY THE BEGINNING OF A FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. (REFERENCE IS TO TO 6/10/82 HABIB/ASSAD MEETING.)

6. WHEN SENATOR TOWER OFFERED HIS VIEW THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO WITHDRAW, ASSUMING APPROPRIATE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR ITS NORTHERN BORDER, AND THAT ISRAEL IS PREPARED TO SEE SOME SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN LEBANON IF IT DOES NOT THREATEN ISRAEL, ASSAD SEEMED ASTOUNDED. HE ASKED THE SENATOR IF HE UNDERSTOOD ISRAEL WOULD ACCEPT A SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN LEBANON. SENATOR RESPONDED IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING, AND HE DOES NOT SPEAK FOR THE USG, THAT ISRAEL WOULD ACCEPT SOME PRESENCE, NOT A LARGE PRESENCE, PROVIDED SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE FOR ITS NORTHERN BORDER. FURTHER, THE SENATOR SAID, THE USG RESPECTS TRADITIONAL SYRIAN INFLUENCE IN LEBANON, AND EXPECTS IT WILL CONTINUE. ASSAD RESPONDED THAT THE EIGHT POINTS DID

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NOT EMBODY WHAT THE SENATOR HAD SAID.

7. IN THE CONTEXT OF EXPLAINING WHY HE BELIEVED THE GENEVA CONFERENCE DECISION THAT LEBANON IS "ARAB" IS NOT OF MERELY RHETORICAL IMPORTANCE, ASSAD NOTED THAT IDEOLOGICALLY ALL ARABS ARE IN FAVOR OF ARAB UNITY. BUT TO MOVE FROM THAT PROPOSITION TO THE SUGGESTION, AS MADE BY PRESIDENT REAGAN, THAT SYRIA WANTS A "GREATER SYRIA", IS JUST NOT CORRECT. SYRIA WAS INVITED INTO LEBANON BY A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND A

SECRET

SECRET

84 3429786

SSO

PAGE 003
TOR: 211848Z FEB 84

NC 3429786

CONSTITUTIONAL PARLIAMENT. IT WILL LEAVE WHEN A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (HE SAID EXPLICITLY HE WAS NOT SAYING THIS MUST BE A NEW FRANJIYA-KARAMI GOVERNMENT) ASKS SYRIA TO GO. SYRIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LEBANON DOES NOT, REPEAT NOT, SPRING FROM A MILITARY PRESENCE. THEREFORE, WHEN A GNU IS FORMED, WHETHER IT ASKS SARG TO STAY OR TO LEAVE, SARG WILL NOT, REPEAT NOT, STAY -- "WE HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH."

8. IN RESPONSE TO SENATOR TOWER'S STATEMENT THAT JUMBLATT HAS CALLED FOR GEMAYEL'S RESIGNATION AND TRIAL, ASSAD SAID THIS IS LEBANESE BUSINESS -- "WE NEITHER ACCEPT NOR REJECT THIS VIEW." ASKED FOR HIS PERSONAL OPINION ON WHETHER GEMAYEL MUST GO IF RECONCILIATION IS TO BE POSSIBLE, ASSAD SAID "TRULY WE HAVE NOT FORMULATED OUR POSITION." HE NOTED THE CALL FOR RESIGNATION CAME FROM LEBANESE NATIONALISTS AFTER THE BOMBING OF SOUTH BEIRUT. FOR SARG, THE MATTER IS NOT PERSONAL -- IF GEMAYEL AGREES WITH SYRIA'S GOALS, SYRIA IS WITH HIM, AND VICE VERSA. WHAT IS IMPORTANT, ASSAD STRESSED, IS THAT THERE BE NO WINNERS OR LOSERS. NATIONAL DIALOGUE IS CRITICAL, AND TO BE SUCCESSFUL REQUIRES ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND ELIMINATION OF THE MAY 17 AGREEMENT.

9. WHEN SENATOR TOWER, REITERATING HE WAS NOT A USG SPOKESMAN, INDICATED HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT THE USG WILL NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF AN AGREEMENT BY THE PARTIES (IN LIEU OF MAY 17) WHICH WOULD LEAD TO PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, ASSAD RESPONDED THIS WAS A "VERY POSITIVE SIGN," A PHRASE HE REPEATED TWICE.

10. FINALLY, WHEN THE SENATOR NOTED HE WOULD BE CONSULTING WITH THE SECRETARY AND AMBASSADOR RUMSFELD UPON HIS RETURN TO THE U.S., ASSAD SPOKE FOR SEVERAL MINUTES ABOUT SYRIA'S VIEWS. SARG WANTS, HE SAID, A UNIFIED, INDEPENDENT LEBANON; SYRIAN PRESENCE IS LIMITED TO THE WISHES OF A REPRESENTATIVE GNU; ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL MUST BE WITHOUT ANY LINK WHATSOEVER TO SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL; SYRIA DOES NOT OBJECT TO SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS MADE BY THE LEBANESE IN THE SOUTH; LEBANESE PARTIES HAVE ANNOUNCED THEY ARE READY TO MAKE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT, THE DETAILS OF WHICH THE LEBANESE SHOULD WORK OUT; MAY 17 MUST BE ABROGATED; SYRIA WILL RESPOND TO WHATEVER REQUESTS A REAL GNU MAY MAKE. OVERALL, ASSAD SAID, IT IS IN SYRIA'S INTEREST TO HAVE A STABLE LEBANON -- INSTABILITY IN SYRIA'S NEIGHBOR IS MORE INJURIOUS TO SYRIA THAN TO THE U.S.; SYRIA WANTS FRATERNAL RELATIONS WITH LEBANON; SARG HAS NO INTEREST IN FIGHTING THE U.S. "AND WILL NOT FIGHT THE U.S.", BUT USG POLICY IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE BECAUSE IT IS NOT IN USG INTERESTS; SARG WANTS "GOOD, NORMAL RELATIONS" WITH THE U.S.

11. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE HEARD ASSAD VOLUNTEER "SARG HAS NO OBJECTION" TO SPECIAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOUTH LEBANON -- WHICH WOULD IMPLY, OF COURSE, AN IMPLICIT RECOGNITION THAT ISRAEL HAS LEGITIMATE SECURITY CONCERNS. ASSAD'S REFERENCE TO LEBANESE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SOUTH PRESUMABLY REFERS TO JUMBLATT'S REMARKS TO THE PRESS THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AN ENHANCED UNIFIL, WITH ALL THE PALESTINIAN FORCES UNITED IN "ONE" BRIGADE UNDER THE FULL CONTROL OF THE GOL. IN ANY CASE, ASSAD IS TALKING ABOUT SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON THAT WOULD BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOL (WITH POSSIBLE UN ASSISTANCE) ACTING IN FULL SOVEREIGNTY OVER ITS OWN TERRITORY, AND NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL SUCH AS THAT OF MAY 17.

12. BEIRUT MINIMIZE CONSIDERED. RUGH

SECRET

SECRET

84 3429786 SSO

PAGE 004
TOR: 211848Z FEB 84

NC 3429786

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